

EARLY ITALIAN OPERA AND THE FORM OF LYCIDAS

by

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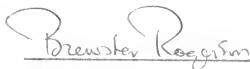
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EARLY ITALIAN OPERA AND THE FORM OF LYCIDAS

I.

The relation of John Milton's poetry to the art of music has been a subject of broad and continuing interest among twentieth-century scholars--interest substantially justified by much of the poet's background, as well as by the content of his works. While there has been no great accumulation of works exploring the extent and significance of this relation, there have been several important and generous contributions which are now a part of our fundamental knowledge about Milton. Among these are to be listed studies by Sigmund Spaeth, James Holly Hanford, and Ernest Brennecke, the last of whom, though his subject is Milton the elder, tells us much that is relevant to the musical background in which the poet grew up.¹

But of all the studies thus far, perhaps the most directly relevant and fully argued is the section on Milton in Mrs. Gretchen Finney's book, Musical Backgrounds for English Literature: 1580 - 1660,² which develops a case for the influence of contemporary Italian opera on the structure of Comus, Lycidas, and Samson Agonistes. In an initial survey of Milton's musical imagery, Mrs. Finney uncovers what she considers a strong affinity with certain new and exciting developments in seventeenth-century music--in particular, the revolutionary experiments of the Italian inventors of opera.

Opera, or the dramma per musica as it was first called, was the most spectacular fruit of the efforts of the Florentine Camerata, which set out in the

¹Milton's Knowledge of Music: Its Sources and Its Significance in His Works (Princeton, 1913); "Appendix F," A Milton Handbook, 4th ed. (New York, 1946)--this takes up the Italian tour and its musicological implications; John Milton the Elder and His Music (New York, 1938).

²New Brunswick, New Jersey, 1962, pp. 161 - 237.

1580's to reform the vocal music of its day. The Camerata was at first composed almost entirely of litterati, not professional musicians, and their aims were primarily literary. They wanted to revise techniques of text-setting in order to preserve the integrity of poetry in its musical rendition, and thus to prevent the laceramento della poesia or tearing the poetry to pieces--the inevitable result of polyphonic techniques. Secondly, they wanted to emulate the achievement of the Greeks, which they believed to have been a perfect marriage of word and music, making the two arts as one. Opera then was the Camerata's attempt to reproduce Greek tragedy, in their view the very pinnacle of the Greek achievement. In the first drammi per musica--Peri's La Dafne in 1597, and the Eurydice of Peri and Caccini in 1600--the musical innovations of the Camerata took their definitive form in the appearance of recitative or monody, and thereby effected the fundamental revolution of all baroque music.³

Mrs. Finney suggests that for the mature Milton, as for the Camerata, the ideal relation of music to verse was that of servant to master. In the sonnet to Henry Lawes, for example, the composer was praised not for "imaging divine harmony" but for setting words justly to music, in that he

First taught our English Musick how to span
Words with just note and accent...

and also for serving the poet:

Thou honour'st Verse, and Verse must send her wing

³ Basically recitative was a solo voice freed of all polyphonic ties, at its best moving dynamically and expressively over a stable bass. See Manfred Bukofzer, Music in the Baroque Era (New York, 1947), pp. 1- 19; 55 - 62.

To honour thee, the Priest of Phoebus Quire
That tun'st their happiest lines in hymn or story.⁴

Thus, Milton agreed, knowingly or unknowingly, with those Italian theorists who had asserted that

...music is [first] nothing other than the fable, and last and not the contrary, the rhythm and the sound.

Mrs. Finney is led by this concurrence of views to question its implications.

The problem of Milton's awareness of the Italian 'school' remains a tantalizing one. Did he recognize his kinship with Italian theorists, poets and composers, who had, like himself, judged music by its effects, who denied, as he did in maturity, that man-made music is based on a natural law that makes of it an inevitable image of the universe? What was the extent of his acquaintance with the early experiments in producing a new music that would project the meaning of words, without which music merely pleased the ear? There are no positive answers to these questions, but one can find illumination, perhaps, by turning from the musical imagery of Milton's poems to their themes and their structural organization...⁵

And the next three chapters of her book are accordingly devoted to just such studies of Comus, Lycidas and Samson Agonistes, pointing out their structural ties with this revolutionary yet classical form that would surely have attracted the attention of Milton as it did of all the musicians of Europe.

Particularly provocative is Mrs. Finney's study entitled "A Musical Background for Lycidas."⁶ Because of the complexities of its form, Lycidas has for

⁴Finney, p. 170.

⁵Ibid., p. 174.

⁶Ibid., pp. 195 - 219.

many years led scholars to considerable speculation about its sources. These include not only pastoral elegy as Hanford has shown us, and not only the Italian canzone as we learn from F. T. Prince; but if we believe Mrs. Finney the Italian dramma per musica as well.⁷ In her study she finds evidence of the direct influence of two in particular: La Favola d'Orfeo written by Monteverdi in 1607 to a text by Alessandro Striggio; and Steffano Landi's La Morte d'Orfeo written in 1619. The nature of this influence, along with her very sensitive and perceptive reading of Lycidas, makes for a particularly interesting and complex case; but it seems to me that extended consideration of that case raises a few problems. Since Mrs. Finney's researches do indeed present themselves as solutions to the subtle mysteries of the form of Lycidas, in this paper I should like to take a closer look at her findings and to try to clarify the issues which I think they raise.

II.

Mrs. Finney begins her study with an analysis of Lycidas that proceeds on this basis:

Only a close and careful analysis of the 'verse paragraphs' of Lycidas from the point of view of possible musical setting can serve to establish the first point--that the poem shows definite structural parallels with sung poetry of Milton's day, and that it suggests a definite manner of musical setting which was peculiar to a specific musical form.⁸

She has set out to look at the poem from a precise point of view, that of pos-

⁷"The Pastoral Elegy and Milton's Lycidas," PMLA, 25 (1910), 403 - 447; The Italian Element in Milton's Verse (Oxford, 1954).

⁸Finney, p. 198.

sible musical setting. And her objectives are also quite definite: to establish that the poem shows structural parallels with sung poetry of its day, and that it suggests a certain manner of musical setting.

In making her analysis Mrs. Finney considers the lines of the verse paragraphs and finds that they fall into natural groups or sections which are musically identifiable as recitative, aria or chorus. The first nine lines of the poem, for example, obviously represent a prologue, she says, which is ostensibly sung by a shepherd, but which is general and noble enough to suit a personification of Tragedy. That it would certainly be sung in recitative is indicated by its definite declamatory pauses and harsh consonants, as well as by its position as prologue. On the other hand, the liquid alliteration and lyricism of the next five lines, as well as the comment they make upon the preceding prologue, suggest chorus. At the beginning of paragraph two, the formal address and broken pauses indicate a return to recitative, this time sung by a shepherd. The analysis continues in this vein, and very sensitively responds to the "word music" of the lines to identify appropriate kinds of musical setting. Such variations in the poem's style are noted as these: in one place, a solo voice in quasi-recitative; a lighter, gayer passage, perhaps set to a pastoral 6-8 or 12-8 meter; a declamatory monologue indicating recitative; or a meditative section suggesting chant-like recitative; and so on. (The text of the poem, divided and labeled according to Mrs. Finney's reading, is reproduced in the Appendix.)

The breakdown of the text is momentarily concluded at line 84 ("Of so much fame in Heav'n expect thy meed"), which represents the end of the first of three major divisions of the poem. The second division, beginning with line 85 ("O Fountain Arethuse, and thou honour'd flood"), Mrs. Finney finds to be entirely in recitative, in the form of declamatory dialogues which suggest oratorio. The third and final division beginning with line 132 ("Return Alpheus, the dread

voice is past") is very similar to the first and moves from recitative to chorus in much the same way. The climax of the poem, which depicts the reception of Lycidas into the communion of saints in Heaven, occurs in what is perhaps a large majestic and melodious chorus. And the last eight lines she finds to be pastoral epilogue.

Mrs. Finney's careful examination of the musical possibilities of the lines also results in an overall conception of the form of the poem. She describes it as a clearly defined three-part structure, in which each part progresses consciously from pastoral to query to answer. In section one, for example, the questioning of the shepherd is answered by Phoebus; in section two, St. Peter provides the culminating reply; and in section three, the reply is implicit in the understanding or vision of a Christian apotheosis. Each succeeding reply rises in crescendo over the answers given in preceding sections. The first and third sections frame the middle one, and share obvious parallels in rhythm and mood. This aspect of the structure, Mrs. Finney notes, recalls the earlier Comus, in which the first and last parts frame a middle part of philosophical argument.

Considering the elements of structure and features of style exhibited by Lycidas, an analogous musical form would be large and vocal, dramatic in character, made up of a series of solos--both arias and recitative--and probably choruses. It would have, like Lycidas, a prologue and epilogue, and would deal seriously with a pastoral subject that combines Christian and classical ideas. There would be an emphasis on dialogue, and a method of presentation that combines action and narration. The dramma per musica is precisely the form outlined by such a description; and it, Mrs. Finney concludes, was very probably the influence which governed the form of Lycidas. Her conclusion is further supported by suggestions of dramatic presentation in Lycidas, such as, for exam-

ple, the description of events in present tense--a new feature in pastoral.

But now my Oate proceeds
And listens to the Herald of the Sea... (88-89)

The result is an impression of pageantry which tends to make the reader part of an audience. The presence of recitative, prologue, and epilogue also contributes to this impression; and Mrs. Finney also recalls that recitative is primarily dramatic, not lyric.

III.

Having arrived at the dramma per musica as a form generally analogous to Lycidas, Mrs. Finney settles upon several particular operas, because they share the subject of Lycidas, which is intimately related to the myth of Orpheus. Since there were four operas dealing with Orpheus prior to Milton's writing of Lycidas, she naturally turns to them as possible sources. And she finds that two demonstrate striking structural and textual parallels with Milton's poem. They are, as already noted, La Favola d'Orfeo by Monteverdi and Striggio, which was produced in Mantua in 1607; and Steffano Landi's La Morte d'Orfeo, produced in 1619 in Rome.⁹

La Favola d'Orfeo, or simply Orfeo as it is generally called, seems to Mrs. Finney to exhibit the best case for direct indebtedness. Like Lycidas, the opera opens with a prologue in recitative--a characteristic feature of opera of the period. In Orfeo this prologue is sung by a personification of Music, and one

⁹With Monteverdi's Orfeo, dramma per musica passes out of the hands of the Florentine litterati and into those of the professional musicians. Cf. Paul Henry Lang, Music In Western Civilization (New York, 1941), pp. 334-352, for discussion of the development of the Camerata's theories into opera and evolution of that form under Monteverdi; also for second and third decade developments in Rome which include Landi's contributions. Cf. also Bukofzer, pp. 55-62.

should recall that the prologue of Lycidas was general and noble enough in style to have suited a personification of Tragedy.

Dal mio Permesso amato a voi ne vegno...
 Quinci a dirvi d'Orfeo desio mi sprona,
 d'Orfeo...

(I come to tell you of Orpheus, of Orpheus
 who drew wild beasts by his singing.)¹⁰

And in Lycidas:

I come to pluck your Berries harsh and crude...
 For Lycidas is dead, dead ere his prime... (3, 8)

In both works the first section outlines the "plot." In Orfeo this is sung in recitative by a shepherd.

Cantiam, Pastori,
 In sì soavi accenti,
 Che sian degni d'Orfeo nostri concenti.

(Let us sing, shepherds, in such smooth accents
 that our efforts may be worthy of Orpheus.)

And in Lycidas we find the lines which Mrs. Finney has ascribed to chorus:

Who would not sing for Lycidas? he knew
 Himself to sing and build the lofty rhyme. (10-11)

Early in each text occurs an invocation to the muses with a significant similarity in imagery. In Orfeo a nymph sings:

¹⁰Citations from Orfeo and La Morte d'Orfeo are taken from Mrs. Finney's text unless otherwise indicated. The sources used by Mrs. Finney are the original libretti reprinted in Angelo Solerti, Gli Albori del Melodramma (Milan, 1904), V. III, 241 ff, Orfeo; and 293 ff, La Morte d'Orfeo. Citations from Orfeo not taken from Mrs. Finney are from the Étairé Music Shop libretto, Ital. & Eng. (New York, 1949). All translations are my own.

Muses, your sonorous strings tear away the gloom
 from every cloud. And while today we call upon
 Hymen to propitiate Orpheus, on well-tempered chords
 let your song sound in concord to ours.

(At this point, there is no hint of tragedy in Orfeo, and the muses are asked to join the joyous songful celebration of the marriage of Orpheus and Eurydice.) In Lycidas we find a similar reference to songful muses who sweep the strings of the cithara.

Begin, then, Sisters of the sacred well
 That from beneath the seat of Jove doth spring,
 Begin and somewhat loudly sweep the string. (15-17)

In Lycidas, the muses "somewhat loudly sweep the string"; and in Orfeo, we find "cetre sonore" and "ben temprate corde."

La Favola d'Orfeo like Lycidas is found to fall into three basic divisions, though written in five acts. The mid-sections of each work have less in common than the first and third sections; but Mrs. Finney notes that they do share one important feature.

Common to both is a startling intrusion of the Christian conception of the deity, though less radical in Orfeo than in the attack on the Church in Lycidas.¹¹

In Lycidas, this Christian intrusion is expressed in the diatribe of Saint Peter against the church. In Orfeo it is far less explicitly Christian. At one point, a Spirit in Hades comments on Pluto's qualified decision to free Eurydice. It says simply that the almighty king's word is law. A second Spirit answers that Orpheus will achieve his desire if reason guides him and triumphs over his wild heart's longing. This might easily be interpreted as extending beyond a pagan

¹¹Finney, p. 198.

reference to Pluto to a Christian significance, especially considering that reason versus passion is the traditional Christian interpretation given to the Orpheus story. At a later point, after Orpheus has lost his bride by disobeying Pluto's mandate not to gaze upon her, a chorus comments in a seemingly Christian vein.

É la virtute un raggio
 Di celeste bellezza
 Pregio de l'alma ond'ella sol s'apprezza...

(Virtue which redeems the soul is a ray
 of heavenly beauty.)¹²

The endings of the two works are also strikingly similar, Mrs. Finney says, in their

imposition of a Christian concept of death
 on an essentially classical poem...in a
 remarkable similarity of phraseology.¹³

The Christian concepts are expressed in Orfeo in rather general terms--again there is no explicit Christian pronouncement; but rather, references to life immortal in heaven, or to heaven where truth and goodness are one. And these lines describe ritual, but not necessarily Christian worship:

While we will offer, joyfully and piously,
 sacrifice, incense, and prayers.

The last chorus of Orfeo contains another two lines which suggest to Mrs. Finney the Fame passage in Lycidas.

E chi semina fra doglie
 D'ogni grazia il frutto coglie...

¹²Orfeo, Elaine libretto.

¹³Finney, p. 214.

(He who sows in sorrows, will reap the
fruit of every grace in heaven.)

The Fame passage is also recalled in Act II of Orfeo, Mrs. Finney says, in a choral passage commenting on the fruitless labor of man.

Non si fidi uom mortale
Di ben caduco e frale
Che tosto fugge, e spesso
A gran salita il precipizio é presso.

(Mortal man may not trust in one fate,
so changeable and crafty, who soon runs off,
and often at the great pinnacle the precipice
is near.)

This passage is prefaced by a line which is repeated throughout this section of the opera. Orpheus is being told of the death of his new bride Eurydice, and the chorus chants:

Ahi, caso acerbo, ah! fat'empio e crudele...

(Alas, bitter end, alas, cruel and wicked fate.)

The suggestive similarity of these sentiments to the sentiments expressed in the Fame passage adds considerable support in Mrs. Finney's mind to her case.

The last item of comparison between La Favola d'Orfeo and Lycidas has to do with the Shepherd in Lycidas "warbling his Dorick lay."

It is interesting that the plaintive instrumental epilogue which closes Orfeo is written in the ecclesiastical Dorian mode, and that the final pastoral epilogue of Lycidas ends, too, with the shepherd 'warbling his Dorick lay.'¹⁴

With that concluding comment Mrs. Finney turns to Steffano Landi's La Morte

¹⁴Finney, p. 215.

d'Orfeo to find one impressive instance of textual parallel to Lycidas. It appears in the concluding scene of the opera, which describes the new flashing gold in the divine heavens announcing the apotheosis of Orpheus. The flashing gold metaphor in La Morte is significantly akin to the metaphor in Lycidas of the day star that dies and rises again to flame in the forehead of the morning sky, since both symbolize the glorious reception of the hero in heaven. In La Morte d'Orfeo the new flashing gold outshines all else in the heavens; in Lycidas the saint joins the company of the blessed that sing "and singing in their glory move." The chorus in La Morte goes on to sing:

Non piu, non piu lamenti,
 Non piu, non piu querele:
 Non son i raggi spenti,
 Son giunte al ciel le fortunate vele:
 Orfeo ancora vive
 In terra no, ma nell'eteree rive.

(No more, lament no more; no more, no longer complain;
 his lights are not spent, but his fortunate ship has reached
 heaven: Orpheus lives still, not on earth but on eternal shores.)

Leaving aside the fact that they voice an age-old convention of pastoral elegy, these lines do resemble somewhat the same command in Lycidas.

Weep no more, woful Shepherds, weep no more...

IV.

Granted the perceptiveness and suggestiveness of Mrs. Finney's interpretation of Lycidas, and granted the parallels the poem seems to share with Orfeo and La Morte d'Orfeo, several points are open to objection.

For one thing, some of the similarities are explicable as simply the result of the pastoral tradition which the works have in common. Dramma per musica,

as Mrs. Finney tells us, was derived from Italian pastoral drama. Hence it would draw upon classical and Renaissance tradition equally with Lycidas. Thus, for example, the invocation of the songful muses might easily have originated independently in each case, since it has precedence in the classical tradition. Hesiod's induction to the Theogony sings of the muses, "Queens of Mt. Helicon," who dance about the altar of Zeus. In the second Prolusion, Milton refers to the story "which has prevailed from the very beginning of things...about the Muses dancing day and night about the altar of Jove." Later in II Penseroso he writes:

...the Muses in a ring
Aye round about Jove's Altar sing... (47.- 48)

The only meaningful point left to the comparison then is the reference to a stringed instrument: "cetre sonore" and "ben temprate corde" in Orfeo, and "sweep the string" in Lycidas--not in itself an impressive piece of evidence.¹⁵

The pastoral tradition also provides for another of Mrs. Finney's points. Hughes explains that Doric became the standard mode for pastoral poetry because Doric Greek was the language in which Theocritus, Bion and Moschus wrote.¹⁶ Therefore, both opera and pastoral elegy might be expected to use or allude to the Doric mode.

Another point which I think needs some attention is the one Mrs. Finney makes about the imposition of Christian thought on classical material. While a mixture of classical and Christian might need explanation in the dramma per musica, it is thoroughly characteristic of Milton's work. Consequently the St. Peter passage might be startling in its asperity, but not in its Christianity--not in the

¹⁵Merritt Y. Hughes, ed., John Milton: "Paradise Regained," The Minor Poems and "Samson Agonistes" (New York, 1937), p. 285, n. 15-16.

¹⁶Hughes, p. 296, n. 189.

light of Milton's previous and future practices. Furthermore, since Christian elements were well naturalized in the Renaissance pastoral tradition--and since Renaissance pastoral elegy affords many instances of harsh satirical digressions--dramma per musica cannot very well claim to be the source of either the Christianity or the "digression" in Milton. Christian concepts are certainly adumbrated in Lycidas considerably earlier than the St. Peter passage. And there seems to be little similarity between the clarity and forcefulness of the pronouncements in Milton's poem and the lines in Orfeo, which are only vaguely Christian. Similarly, the Christian conclusion of Lycidas--culminating in the Christian interpretation of death--does not need explanation outside of Milton's own characteristic thought. What would be startling indeed would be a pagan concept of death offered as the final statement of any serious poem by Milton. Consequently one tends to feel that the note of heavenly reward at the conclusion of Orfeo is simply irrelevant to Milton's choices in Lycidas.

That note of reward, however, is also part of another comparison--perhaps the most interesting Mrs. Finney makes. In it, she points out the similarity of the Fame passage to the conclusion of reward just mentioned, and also to lines sung by the chorus in Act II of Orfeo which comment upon the fruitless labor of man--fruitless because of the unpredictability of fate.

And often at the great pinnacle,
the precipice is near.

Here we recognize the de casibus theme in a veiled allusion to the wheel of fortune; it expresses the misfortune of Orpheus who has fallen from happiness in the loss of his bride. The theme is, of course, very common in medieval and Renaissance literature, and is given thoroughly conventional treatment in the opera. The Fame passage in Lycidas, however, belongs only in part to the de casibus tradition. Certainly there is an element of it:

But the fair guerdon when we hope to find,
 And think to burst out into subtle blaze,
 Comes the blind Fury with th'abhorred shears,
 And slits the thin-spun life...(73 - 76)

But the entire passage clearly embodies another classical and Renaissance theme, which seems to have greater significance here than the de casibus. This theme is "desire for fame," very close to if not a variant of the Renaissance "eternizing" concept, and variously treated as the loss or triumph of fame, meaning of fame, importance or vanity of fame, and so on. The hope that his work will be a "monument nobler than statues or bronze" could be traced all the way back to Plato. And Petrarch exclaims that

Fame triumphs over Death and there
 files a procession of warriors of old, and
 finally writers and thinkers whose names
 are handed down in a halo of glory.

In Shakespeare we find the lines:

Death, in guerdon of her wrongs
 Gives her fame which never dies, (Much Ado, v, 3, 6)

and again

Let fame, that all hunt after in their lives
 Live register'd upon our brazen tombs, (L.L.Lost, i, 1, 1)

or in the sonnets

So long lives this, and this gives life to thee. (XVIII, 14)

Examples are numerous and, in the sum, seem to express sentiments more in keeping with the total conception of Milton's Fame passage. Perhaps this opinion is supported by the fact that it is generally known as the "Fame passage," not the

"Fate passage."¹⁷ The one definite connection between the lines in Orfeo and in Lycidas is that loss is in each the result of a fateful death. One should remember, however, that both themes are conventional and thus easily accessible to Milton as well as to Striggio--however similar or dissimilar the lines.

In the conclusion of Orfeo the "chi semina fra doglie" lines represent fairly standard Christian fare: blessed are the sorrowful for they shall rejoice. In the Fame passage the issue is somewhat different. It is not simply a matter of heavenly reward for sorrow, or loss, or pain on earth. It seems to me a rather more sophisticated idea, involving the immortality on earth of truly deserved fame, and the justice of God who is in the long run the distributor of fame not only in heaven but on earth. Jove pronounces lastly on each deed--the deed that is performed on earth by a mortal man--and the fame flows from the deed on earth as pronounced upon by God. Thus it seems to me that the supposed resemblances are not particularly strong. But even if they were, Orfeo would not stand up as the obvious source, because, to repeat, of the conventionality of the theme and of the images.

The textual parallels described by Mrs. Finney are arresting. One's only complaint or point of hesitation would be that there are not enough of them. Granted this reservation, the feeling that the parallels themselves are perhaps not obvious enough to pass for certain evidence becomes of considerable weight. The same basic objection might be raised against the subject of Orpheus as a substantial link between Lycidas and the operas. The relationship of Orpheus to Lycidas is complex and subtle, while to the operas it is simple and overt.

¹⁷ Plato, Symposium, 209c; Phaedrus, 276c. Isocrates, Antidosis, 7j. This thought is echoed in Horace, Odes, 3; Ovid, Metamorphoses, 15, 871; Statius, Silvae, 3, 3, 31. The Petrarch citation is taken from The Works of Edmund Spenser, Variorum Edition (1936), I, p. 418; Cf. also "Triumph of Fame," The Triumphs of Petrarch, Ernest Hatch Wilkins, trans. (Chicago, 1962).

Even though there is only one direct allusion to the myth in Lycidas, it does unquestionably contribute a great deal to the poem; for one thing, as a richly evocative and poignant image. Then too Lycidas may be compared to Orpheus in his role as poet, just as he compares with St. Peter in his role as priest. But since the Orpheus myth was a commonplace in Renaissance music and literature, and since it was widely used in Christian allegory, it would have been a natural choice on Milton's part without the operas to assist him. What may be more significant is that Milton's conception of Orpheus in his poem is quite different from the conception found in the operas. In both operas the significant conflict is within Orpheus, and its nature is the conventional Christian opposition between reason and passion for control of the will. In Milton, Orpheus represents the poet-singer who died in the waters and could not be saved even by his muse mother. I do not believe there is any suggestion in Milton of the theme of the culpability of Orpheus, or of the struggle against passion.

V.

If one tended to feel that there was substantial internal evidence of the influence of Italian opera on Lycidas, it perhaps would not be necessary to pursue the discussion further. But the influence is clearly not unmistakable, as interesting as it certainly is. Therefore, it is necessary to raise a few points about method and also review a few areas for further research.

For one thing, the accessibility of the scores and libretti to Milton remains questionable. The bibliographical and biographical inadequacies on this subject present a tantalizing mystery just waiting for some scholar to tackle it. What we do know is that the nuova musica did influence English composers within the first decade of the century, because we see in them the adoption of

a monodic style.¹⁸ Coperario's Funeral Tears for the Earl of Devonshire in 1606 was a collection of seven elegies written in the monodic style, for example. And Alfonso Ferrabosco published two monodic collections in 1609. One was a volume of twenty-eight "declamatory ayres," similar to the monodies of Caccini.¹⁹ Perhaps the most important figure was Nicholas Lanier, court composer to Charles I, who introduced the new style into the masque: in 1617 Ben Jonson's Lovers Made Men was "set to Music after the Italian manner, stilo recitativo, by Nic. Lanier, who was not only ordered to set the Music, but to paint the scenes." Vision of Delight, another Jonson masque performed in the same year, did not exhibit the unvaried measure and constant rhyme of the former masque; but rather distinguished between air and recitative by means of verses of different measure. Unfortunately the music to this masque, also by Lanier, is lost.²⁰ There is some evidence that Dowland was in Florence near the turn of the century, and may have had contact with the Camerata. Coperario spent some time in Italy during the same years, and later Nicholas Lanier was twice sent there to select pictures for King Charles I. One of those trips was made in the mid-twenties.²¹

Clearly, it is possible that scores and libretti of various drammi per musica were brought back to England and privately circulated. We have, however, absolutely no knowledge of which ones were brought back, which ones might have been published, or who had access to them. There is no record of the publication either in English or in England of the two operas under consideration in regard to

¹⁸Monodic style, first exhibited in recitative, basically means emphasis on a solo melody over a basso continuo, as opposed to a polyphonic style.

¹⁹Henry Davey, History of English Music (London, 1895), p. 231.

²⁰Charles Burney, A General History of Music (New York, 1789), II, pp. 277-278.

²¹Finney, p.134 - 135, notes that Lanier heard the "Lamento d'Arianna" for the first time on this trip.

Lycidas. What we seem to need is a thoroughgoing research of court libraries, and of private libraries of the important musicians and their patrons. Perhaps the scores would turn up, along with significant information about who originally had them, and who had access to them.

All in all, what strikes me as the most serious difficulty with the conjectures produced by Mrs. Finney is also the most subtle and the most difficult to get at. Lycidas is being compared to a musical-literary form. How is the comparison to be made? Well, as she says, only "a close and careful analysis of the 'verse paragraphs' of Lycidas from the point of view of possible musical setting can serve to establish...that it shows definite structural parallels with sung poetry...and suggests a definite manner of musical setting which was peculiar to a specific musical form."²² That means that the reader or analyst must imagine the setting Lycidas would have received if it had been set to music. And it comes very close to assuming that Milton intended to have it set, or that he at least had a musical setting in mind. Now, can one imagine this hypothetical setting with any kind of reliability? That is, can even a sensitive and knowledgeable composer really tell what setting was intended by Milton, or what musical style was in his mind as a pattern for the effects he rendered? This is the crucial question, in my opinion, and after some consideration the answer appears to be no. There is no reliable way to know that lines one through nine are recitative, lines ten through twelve, chorus, etc. And I should like to explain how one might come to this conclusion.

Since there are no indications in the text--titles of sections such as song, prologue, chorus, and so on--musical setting would have to be determined wholly by the lines themselves, namely by their prosody. The stylistic features which

²²Finney, p. 198.

lead Mrs. Finney to assign recitative to the first nine lines of the poem, for example, are the strong declamatory pauses and harsh consonants. But these features or qualities may be accounted for by reasons within the poetry itself. The poetry of Donne exhibits similar qualities, as does some of the other poetry of Milton. In "Death Be Not Proud," for example, we find:

For, those, whom thou think'st, thou dost overthrow,
Die not, poor death, nor yet canst thou kill me; (3 - 4)

or again:

And Jacob came cloth'd in vile harsh attire
But to supplant, and with gainful intent:" (Holy Son., 1633,
7, 11 - 12)

Does Donne owe such effects to recitative?²³ The central problem, however, is not really Mrs. Finney's--or not hers alone. It is the result, for one thing, of the fact, duly recognized by her, that there has been no thoroughgoing study of the effects of recitative on English prosody.²⁴ And underlying this deficiency in scholarship are other facts to further complicate the situation; facts which tend to discourage the very prosodic study needed.

In the first place, there was in England very little experimentation in the relationship between verse metrics and the meters of music. Hence there was no tendency to stereotype them by making a certain verse form require a certain corresponding musical setting. This fact eliminates for us the next best thing to actual direction from author to composer. That is, there is no pattern nor formula in verse that conventionally required recitative, aria or chorus. In Italy there was a good deal of experimentation on this very relationship, because the

²³ John Donne, *The Divine Poems*, ed., Helen Gardner (Oxford, 1952), Holy Sonnets 1633, *Divine Meditations VI - VII*.

²⁴ Finney, p. 136.

Italians wanted very much to stabilize their metrics as the Greeks had done. The experimentation was largely unsuccessful, for reasons lucidly stated by Putnam Aldrich, in his book Rhythm in Seventeenth Century Italian Monody.

...since rhythm and pitch level were already inherent in the Greek syllables the poet, in selecting the words, had already 'composed' the music.

The rhythm of Italian verse...does not [however] depend upon fixed durations of sound. Yet the essence of rhythm is the organization of sounds in time. How can sounds be organized in time if they have no precise duration? The only possible answer to this paradox is that the rhythm is created afresh every time the verse is uttered. The verse on the printed page does not contain the rhythm but only a plan for a rhythm--a plan that may be brought to fulfillment in many different ways. The plan itself is quite definite. It consists of a certain number of syllables, a fixed order of accentuation, and a specified number of syllables between the accents.... The accent stands for a point of emphasis. But it is a mistake to think of the plan as static. The accented syllable does not arrive like a sudden *sforzando* in the midst of an undifferentiated succession of sounds. A well-built verse is dynamic; its syllables are not stationary but in motion, progressing toward a peak. In terms of motion and repose, the accented syllable represents a point of arrival. If it is a final syllable it is also a point of repose...²⁵

While indicating reasons for the failure of the Italian efforts, this passage also sheds light on the same problems in English text setting. The Italian theories did lead later in the century to a temporary standardization by which certain metrical patterns were to receive certain musical treatment and were to suggest certain emotions or actions.²⁶ This fortunately could not and did not last long .

The upshot of all this is that with an Italian text there is a slim chance of deducing the implicit musical setting, provided that one has information about

²⁵New York, 1966, p. 111.

²⁶This occurred in the second half of the seventeenth century in the Neopolitan school.

the school or period which produced the text under examination, and provided that that school or period had precise rules which could be applied. In English verse there is no chance at all without very tangible help from the author, because there were no rules. In Lycidas we have no direction "to be sung in stilo recitativo"; we have nothing but ever so subtle and ever so musical lines divided into verse paragraphs. It is clear that if anything would help us through this pass, it would have to be consideration of texts and settings of contemporary masques and monodies, and comparison of the style of Lycidas to these,

The only recourse, in the absence of identifiable verbal indications of appropriate musical setting, is the ear. The first nine lines perhaps sound like recitative, or remind one of recitative. This is the approach of a composer, and it is perforce individual, subjective, and unpredictable. And as a matter of fact we do not know precisely what early Baroque recitative did sound like anyway. Baroque scores resemble modern scores exactly in melodic notation; but in Italy especially the lingering influence of the practices of Renaissance mensuration makes them difficult to interpret. If we do not really know how the Italian recitative sounded, how can we know, or hear, that Lycidas sounds the same? Furthermore, while English composers adopted the nuova musica they did not at first really understand it. According to Manfred Bukofzer, they could not fully grasp the essence of recitative which was the "affective intensification of the word." To compensate for the resulting lack of pathos and emotional inflexibility, the English emphasized the rhythmic factor at the expense of melodic shape and harmonic interest. This emphasis might assist our efforts, if a characteristic recitative rhythm were identifiable in the verse itself. Bukofzer, however, goes on to say of the five extant songs by Henry Lawes from Comus:

They are quasi-recitatives characterized by incisive marking of the rhyme, frequent and sudden cadences,

discontinuous rhythm, and an erratically moving bass. The melody is carried forward mainly by the prosody of verse fragments. The musical rhythm is, however, not derived from the regular meter of the verse, but is achieved by emphatic repeats of single words or phrases. The tension between the regularity of the poetic meter and the discontinuous cadential fall of²⁷ the music makes for the strong rhythmic interest....

The most important point is that the "musical rhythm is...not derived from the regular meter of the verse" and that it is the tension between the regularity of verse meter and the irregularity of musical rhythm which makes the songs rhythmically interesting. If the distinctive rhythmic interest of English recitative-- and Bukofzer describes the songs from Comus as typical of English recitative-- is mainly derived from this tension just described, then that distinctive rhythm does not exist in the verse alone. And therefore I do not believe that the lines of Lycidas can be reliably identified as recitative, aria or chorus.

A last possibility is suggested by Mrs. Finney's most interesting chapter on Comus: "Comus: Drama per musica."²⁸ In this chapter, the form of Comus is compared to another opera, Tronsarelli's and Mazzocchi's La Catena d'Adone of 1626. This comparison is quite convincing because the evidence is tangible, and there are substantial textual parallels besides. The dramatic structure and musical setting of Comus eliminate many of the problems of interpretation we have been discussing. Mrs. Finney mentions in passing a similarity in Lycidas to the three-part structure of Comus. It occurs to me that one might suggest a further similarity. If Lycidas were eventually determined to be patterned after a dramatic-musical structure; if its changes in mood and treatment of subject could be found to approximate a sequence of recitative, aria and chorus; why could this

²⁷Bukofzer, pp. 184-185.

²⁸Finney, pp. 175-194.

not suggest that a late monodic masque was the model? Why not Comus? Mrs. Finney observes that Comus resembles the dramma per musica in the metrical variation which exists there to suit different kinds of musical setting. These variations lead her to think that Milton might have hoped to have Comus set to music in its entirety, since he provides for recitative with blank verse, for aria with the shorter lines, and for chorus in certain suggestions of group singing. If these variations in structure occur in Comus, Milton could have adapted any ideas about the effects of recitative and chorus from it, as easily as from opera. In the light of the difficulties of establishing such a sequence of effects in Lycidas, one possibility is nearly as unappealing as the other. But even the substantiation of those implicit musical qualities would not necessarily prove that dramma per musica was their source.

The final view to be taken of Mrs. Finney's theory is a more personal one than has thus far been offered. Yet it is in the long run the one which might carry the greatest weight and, simply, mean the most. Lycidas, finally, must be considered as an artistic entity; the perfect vehicle, complete in itself, of an aesthetic experience. From this view Mrs. Finney's interpretation violates the form of Lycidas because it substantially changes it, by imposing an artificial regularity on the subtle and intangible flexibility of Milton's verse. If one feels that this verse is utterly perfect as it was written, one then squirms with greater malaise at its transformation. But the point is this. Aldrich says, as we have noted, that the seventeenth-century Italian experiments failed to regularize verse meters because the rhythms of verse do not depend upon fixed durations of sound. The rhythm is rather created anew each time the verse is uttered; hence the verse is dynamic, its syllables in motion. To even think of a line of Lycidas in a musical setting--even the very best possible setting--destroys the subtle, sensitive music that is already there. If Milton had a

musical ear, he used it to perfection in what he wrote; and it is difficult to imagine him ever allowing his finished product to be "re-orchestrated" at other hands. One factor becomes intensely clear at this point. When the rhythms of verse and the rhythms of music come together in a text setting, music takes over and predominates. This is true, I think, primarily because music asserts and establishes a reliable, a reproducible regularity, and thereby deprives the verse of almost all of its possibilities of variation. These possibilities are somehow evoked in the ear in a sensitive reading. This is very likely the basis of counterpoint in prosody-- hearing the verse according to more than one rhythmic plan at a time. The fuller one's awareness of the rhythmic focal point represented by every word in a good line, the richer the verse becomes. To impose a musical rhythm on the verse is to impoverish it.

Thus, to read or imagine the first nine lines of Lycidas in recitative significantly alters them, and in my opinion significantly detracts from their perfection. And it seems to me that an analysis of a work which seriously alters it and detracts from it, which tends to obscure its essential form, must be looked upon with a cautious and questioning eye. An alternative study of the form of Lycidas in F. T. Prince's The Italian Element in Milton's Verse also takes a close and searching look at the verse paragraphs of the poem, and traces their structure instead to the canzone.²⁹ Mr. Prince's study has the advantage of being entirely literary, bringing in no other artistic medium to complicate matters. His contention is substantially validated by verbal evidence, clearly presented. And while his treatment explains the form of Lycidas, it offers no possible distortions of it nor of the artistic totality. As a consequence it is ultimately more persuasive than Mrs. Finney's view.

Until the deficiencies of scholarship in biographical and bibliographical

²⁹See above, note 7.

areas are met; until the necessary review of prosody in relation to nuova musica is undertaken; and until all analytical treatment of Lycidas comes to fully respect its integrity as a poem, the connection between Lycidas and dramma per musica suggested by Mrs. Finney must be regarded as unproved, and unlikely. But that Milton would have taken an interest in the Camerata's experiments, that he would even have been enthusiastic about their results, seems very likely indeed. Thus the extent of his acquaintance with dramma per musica and the significance of that form to his art become, thanks to Mrs. Finney, an obvious field for continued exploration.

APPENDIX

(Text of Lycidas According to Mrs. Finney's Analysis)

PART ONE: SHEPHERD AS POET--SECULAR AND PASTORAL

Paragraph I: Introduction.

Lines 1 - 9: Prologue in recitative, ostensibly sung by a shepherd, but general and noble enough to suit a personification of Tragedy. Declamatory and definite pauses, harsh consonants.

Yet once more, O ye Laurels, and once more
Ye Myrtles brown, with Ivy never sear,
I com to pluck your Berries harsh and crude,
And with forc'd fingers rude,
Shatter your leaves before the mellowing year.
Bitter constraint, and sad occasion dear,
Compells me to disturb your season due:
For Lycidas is dead, dead ere his prime,
Young Lycidas, and hath not left his peer:

Lines 10 - 14: Chorus. More melodious; liquid alliteration, lyricism. More general subject, and comment on preceding statement.

Who would not sing for Lycidas? he knew
Himself to sing, and build the lofty rhyme.
He must not flote upon his watry bear
Unwept, and welter to the parching wind,
Without the meed of som melodious tear.

Paragraph II: Invocation of the Muse.

Lines 15 - 18: Recitative sung by Shepherd; formal address, broken phrases.

Begin then, Sisters of the sacred well,
That from beneath the seat of Jove doth spring,
Begin, and somewhat loudly sweep the string.
Hence with denial vain, and coy excuse,

Lines 19 - 24: More meditative quality; less grand, less oratorical than Paragraph I.

So may some gentle Muse

With lucky words favour my destin'd Urn,
 And as he passes turn,
 And bid fair peace be to my sable shrowd.
 For we were nurst upon the self-same hill,
 Fed the same flock; by fountain, shade, and rill.

Paragraph III: First subject of poem .

Lines 25 - 31: Shepherd singing in quasi-recitative .

Together both, ere the high Lawns appear'd
 Under the opening eye-lids of the morn,
 We drove a field, and both together heard
 What time the Gray-fly winds her sultry horn,
 Batt'ning our flocks with the fresh dews of night,
 Oft till the Star that rose, at Ev'ning, bright,
 Toward Heav'ns descent had slop'd his westering wheel.

Lines 32 - 36: Lighter, more festive, perhaps to be set to a pastoral 6/8 or 12/8 meter. Ritard in last line introduces slow tempo of next section.

Mean while the Rural ditties were not mute,
 Temper'd to th'Oaten Flute,
 Rough Satyrs danc'd, and Fauns with clov'n heel,
 From the glad sound would not be absent long,
 And old Damaetas lov'd to hear our song.

Paragraph IV.

Lines 37 - 49: Slower, broader, more regular rhythm; and general subject suggest chorus. The iambic line suggests a slow 3/2 or 3/4 meter in which three large beats subdivide into twos.

But O the heavy change, now thou art gon,
 Now thou art gon, and never must return!
 Thee Shepherd, thee the Woods, and desert Caves,
 With wilde Thyme and the gadding Vine o'regrown,
 And all their echoes mourn.
 The Willows, and the Hazle Copses green,
 Shall now no more be seen,
 Fanning their joyous Leaves to thy soft layes.
 As killing as the Canker to the Rose,
 Or Taint-worm to the weanling Herds that graze,
 Or Frost to Flowers, that their gay wardrop wear,
 When first the White Thorn blows;
 Such, Lycidas, thy loss to Shepherds ear.

Paragraph V: The questioning of the nymphs.

Lines 50 - 63: Clearly a monologue, returns to the declamatory style, similar to invocation of muse passage, rhythmically; hence, quasi-recitative. Less oratorical than opening paragraph, moreso than the melodious passages.

Where were ye Nymphs when the remorseless deep
 Clos'd o're the head of your lov'd Lycidas?
 For neither were ye playing on the steep,
 Where your old Bards, the famous Druids, ly,
 Nor on the shaggy top of Mona high,
 Nor yet where Deva spreads her wisard stream:
 Ay me, I fondly dream!
 Had ye bin there--for what could that have don?
 What could the Muse her self that Orpheus bore,
 The Muse her self for her enchanting son
 Whom Universal nature did lament,
 When by the rout that made the hideous roar,
 His goary viage down the stream was sent,
 Down the swift Hebrus to the Lesbian shore.

Paragraph VI: Dialogue between the Shepherd, tempted by the pleasures of the flesh, and Phoebus, asserting rewards of intellectual achievement.

Lines 64 - 69: Meditative quality suggests chant-like recitative.

Alas! What boots it with uncessant care
 To tend the homely slighted Shepherds trade,
 And strictly meditate the thankless Muse,
 Were it not better don as others use,
 To sport with Amaryllis in the shade,
 Or with the tangles of Neaera's hair?

Lines 70 - 84: Declamatory dialogue, accentuated by couplet at the end.

Fame is the spur that the clear spirit doth raise
 (That last infirmity of Noble mind)
 To scorn delights, and live laborious dayes;
 But the fair Guerdon when we hope to find,
 And think to burst out into sudden blaze,
 Comes the blind Fury with th'abhorred shears,
 And slits the thin spun life. But not the praise,
 Phoebus repli'd, and touch'd my trembling ears;
 Fame is no plant that grows on mortal soil,
 Nor in the glistening foil
 Set off to th'world, nor in broad rumour lies,
 But lives and spreads aloft by those pure eyes,
 And perfet witnes of all-judging Jove;
 As he pronounces lastly on each deed,
 Of so much fame in Heav'n expect thy meed.

End of Part One: it has been made up of prologue, invocation, contrasting rhythmic sections in pastoral mood, a section of questioning, and finally the climax of the flesh-spirit dialogue.

PART TWO: SHEPHERD AS PRIEST--ECCLESIASTICAL, MORAL

This middle division differs in mood and tone from the first part, but is similar to it in plan and development of theme. Like Part One, it begins in a pastoral mood; proceeds to a questioning section, with symbols that link ancient and modern elements; and concludes with a moral discussion of the life of self-denial.

The entire division, however, is less stylized, less a set of small forms. Rather, the whole is in recitative, with the stylistic variety permitted by recitative. There are no parts that could be naturally sung by a chorus. The speaker is still a shepherd, but becomes a narrator. Two recitative styles are found: one for the narrator, and one for the characters introduced.

Paragraph VII.

Lines 85 - 87: Transitional , functioning as pivot between Parts One and Two.

O Fountain Arethuse, and thou honour'd fload,
Smooth-sliding Mincius, crown'd with vocal reeds,
That strain I heard was of a higher mood:

Lines 88 - 90: Quiet, almost prosaic introductory lines.

But now my Oat proceeds,
And listens to the Herald of the Sea
That came in Neptune's plea,

Lines 91 - 102: Triton's questioning; more oratorical.

He ask'd the Waves, and ask'd the Fellon Winds,
What hard mishap hath doom'd this gentle swain?
And question'd every gust of rugged wings
That blows from off each beaked Promontory;
They knew not of his story,
And sage Hippotades their answer brings,
That not a blast was from his dungeon stray'd,
The Air was calm, and on the level brine,
Sleek Panope with all her sisters play'd.
It was that fatal and perfidious Bark
Built in th'eclipse, and rigg'd with curses dark,
That sunk so low that sacred head of thine.

Paragraph VIII.

Lines 103 - 106: Introduce Camus.

Next Camus, reverend Sire, went footing slow,
His Mantle hairy, and his Bonnet sedge,
Inwrought with figures dim, and on the edge
Like to that sanguine flower inscrib'd with woe.

Line 107: One dynamic line by Camus.

Ah; Who hath reft(quoth he) my dearest pledge?

Lines 108 - 112: Introduction of Peter.

Last came, and last did go,
The Pilot of the Galilean lake,
Two massy Keyes he bore of metals twain,
(The Golden opes, the Iron shuts amain)
He shook his Miter'd locks, and stern bespake,

Lines 113 - 131: The passionate intonation of St. Peter.

How well could I have spar'd for thee, young swain,
Anow of such as for their bellies sake,
Creep and intrude, and climb into the fold?
Of other care they little reck'ning make,
Then how to scramble at the shearers feast,
And shove away the worthy bidden guest;
Blind mouthes! that scarce themselves know how to hold
A Sheep-hook, or have learn'd ought els the least
That to the faithfull Herdmans art belongs!
What recks it them? What need they? They are sped;
And when they list, their lean and flashy songs
Grate on their scrannel Pipes of wretched straw,
The hungry Sheep look up, and are not fed,
But swoln with wind, and the rank mist they draw,
Rot inwardly, and foul contagion spread:
Beside what the grim Woolf with privy paw
Daily devours apace, and nothing sed,
But that two-handed engine at the door,
Stands ready to smite once, and smite no more.

End of Part Two.

PART THREE: RETURN TO MORE CONVENTIONALLY PASTORAL FORM.

Paragraph IX.

Lines 132 - 133: Choral effect in these two transitional lines. Or lines may be read as recitative changing to the lyricism of following passage.

Return Alpheus, the dread voice is past,
That shrunk thy streams; Return Sicilian Muse,

Lines 134 - 151: Returns to the lyrical, pastoral style of the first part of the poem. But tempo is slower, more elegiac in mood, similar to the lament of nature in Paragraph IV.

And call the Vales, and bid them hither cast
Their Bells, and Flourets of a thousand hues.
Ye valleys low where the milde whispers use,
Of shades and wanton winds, and gushing brooks,
On whose fresh lap the swart Star sparely looks,
Throw hither all your quaint enameld eyes,
That on the green turf suck the honied showres,
And purple all the ground with vernal flowres.
Bring the rathe Primrose that forsaken dies.
The tufted Crow-toe, and pale Gessamine,
The white Pink, and the Pansie freakt with jeat,
The glowing Violet.
The Musk-rose, and the well attir'd Woodbine,
With Cowslips wan that hang the pensive head,
And every flower that sad embroidery wears:
Bid Amarantus all his beauty shed,
And Daffadillies fill their cups with tears,
To strew the Laureat Herse where Lycid lies.

Lines 152 - 153: Transition to the questioning surmise of the following lines, sung by a narrator or a chorus.

For so to interpose a little ease,
Let our frail thoughts dally with false surmise.

Lines 154 - 164: Recitative, in an oratorical delivery which becomes melodic at its height.

Ay me! Whilst thee the shores, and sounding Seas
Wash far away, where ere thy bones are hurl'd,
Whether beyond the stormy Hebrides
Where thou perhaps under the whelming tide

Visit'st the bottom of the monstrous world;
 Or whether thou to our moist vows deny'd,
 Sleep'st by the fable of Bellerus old,
 Where the great vision of the guarded Mount
 Looks toward Namancos and Bayona's hold;
 Look homeward Angel now, and melt with ruth.
 And, O ye Dolphins, waft the haples youth.

Paragraph X: Represents the climax of the progression from the light pastoral flower passage, to forceful recitative, to climax.

Lines 165 - 185: Perhaps a large majestic chorus; too melodic for declamatory recitative, unbroken by punctuation. High point occurs in lines 176 - 181.

Weep no more, woful Shepherds weep no more,
 For Lycidas your sorrow is not dead,
 Sunk though he be beneath the watry floar,
 So sinks the day-star in the Ocean bed,
 And yet anon repairs his drooping head,
 And tricks his beams, and with new spangled Ore,
 Flames in the forehead of the morning sky:
 So Lycidas sunk low, but mounted high,
 Through the dear might of him that walk'd the waves
 Where other groves, and other streams along,
 With Nectar pure his oozy Lock's he laves,
 And hears the unexpressive nuptial Song,
 In the blest Kingdoms meek of joy and love.
 There entertain him all the Saints above,
 In solemn troops and sweet Societies
 That sing, and singing in their glory move,
 And wipe the tears for ever from his eyes.
 Now Lycidas the Shepherds weep no more;
 Henceforth thou art the Genius of the shore,
 In thy large recompense, and shalt be good
 To all that wander in that perilous flood.

Paragraph XI: Epilogue--sung by one person in a strictly pastoral mood of peace and calm.

Thus sang the uncouth Swain to th'Okes and rills,
 While the still morn went out with Sandals gray,
 He touch'd the tender stops of various Quills,
 With eager thought warbling his Dorick lay:
 And now the Sun had stretch'd out all the hills,
 And now was dropt into the Western Bay;
 At last he rose, and twitch'd his Mantle blew:
 Tomorrow to fresh Woods, and Pastures new.³⁰

³⁰John Milton, The Works of John Milton (New York, 1931), I, 76 - 83.

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EARLY ITALIAN OPERA AND THE FORM OF LYCIDAS

by

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Early Italian Opera and the Form of Lycidas

Among the many recent studies of the relation of John Milton's poetry to the art of music, perhaps the most specific and fully argued is to be found in Mrs. Gretchen Finney's Musical Backgrounds for English Literature: 1580 - 1660. Here she develops a case for the influence of contemporary Italian opera (the dramma per musica) upon the very structure of Lycidas.

The complexities of the form of Lycidas have led to extensive speculation about its sources. And Mrs. Finney adds to the possibilities by adducing two significant operas--Monteverdi's and Striggio's La Favola d'Orfeo, 1607, and Landi's La Morte d'Orfeo, 1619. First, she says, the two operas are based on the Orpheus myth, which is intimately related to the subject of Lycidas. Secondly, the verse paragraphs of Lycidas are strongly reminiscent of the pattern of recitative, aria and chorus that characterizes dramma per musica. And third, there are, to her mind, striking similarities of structure and significant textual parallels.

However provocative the discussion of this influence may be, extended consideration of the case raises several problems. For one thing, Mrs. Finney's comparison of the two Orpheus operas to Lycidas does not seem to take full account of the pastoral tradition which all the works have in common, and which explains some of the similarities. Furthermore, the conventionality of certain themes and images, as well as the frequent appearance of the Orpheus myth in Renaissance music and literature, would seem to account for several more of the parallels she describes. Some features are so thoroughly characteristic of Milton's work in general, they need no sources to explain their appearance in Lycidas. Moreover, the scarcity of bibliographical and biographical research into the availability of Italian opera scores in England makes it impossible

at present to be sure what Italian operas Milton actually knew. And there is no literary basis for determining what musical setting is implicit in the lines of Lycidas, if any, because there were no rules in England to standardize techniques of text setting. It is possible that a prosodic study of English monodies and monodic masques would provide the literary basis needed. Further, since it is not known precisely how early baroque recitative sounded, there is no way to even hear that Lycidas sounds the same. Consequently, in the present state of scholarship there seems to be no way outside of the subjective and individual approach of the composer to describe the lines of the poem as Mrs. Finney does. If a reliable way were available, it seems equally possible that a monodic masque might have governed the form of Lycidas rather than dramma per musica.

Finally, one must consider Lycidas as an aesthetic entity complete in itself. The integrity of the poem is in a sense violated by Mrs. Finney's interpretation, in that (for one thing) an artificial regularity is introduced above and beyond the rhythms of the verse. An alternative study such as F. T. Prince's The Italian Element in Milton's Verse, which sees the Italian canzone as the determining element in the form, is perhaps more persuasive, in that it explains the form without offering any possible distortions of it.